

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 38
Greeks, Romans and India

CLCS4007
Matthew Cobb



There is about 5,000 km from Athens to New Delhi.

Monstrous and Mysterious

- ▣ Ctesias physician in the Persian court in 5th C BC.

“Ctesias writes that amongst these same men there is found an animal called the Mantichora which has three rows of teeth like a comb, the face and ears of a human, and bluish eyes. It is red in color with the body of a lion and a tail with stingers like a scorpion. Its voice is as if the sounds of the pipe were mixed with a trumpet and it is a creature of great speed which avidly goes after human flesh.” - **Ctesias** (*FgrH* F45dδ) *Pliny. N.H.* 8.75



Human Races

- ▣ Pygmies (who tend pygmy animals).
- ▣ Men with dogs' heads (bark but can understand Indian speech), live up to 200 years.
- ▣ Milk people (can't defecate so vomit).
- ▣ Reverse aging people (up to 30 have white hair, after that it grows darker), also can sleep in their ears.



O de hominib⁹ diuersar⁹ formar⁹ dicit^r Plⁱ. li. vi. ca. ij. Et Aug. li. xvi. de ci. dei. ca. viij. Et I^ust^us^u vorus E^thi. li. xi. ca. iij. oia q^{ue} sequuntur in india. C^{on}ocephali homines sunt canina capita habentes cu^m latratu loquuntur aucupio viuunt. vt dicit^r Plⁱ. qui omnes vescuntur pellibus animaliu.

E^t coeples in India vnu oculum hnt in fronte sup^{er} nasum h^{ic} solas ferar^u carnes comedunt. Ideo agnoscite vocatur supra nasomonas confinesq^{ue} illoru^m homines esse: vtriusq^{ue} nature inter se vicibus coeunt. Calliphanes tradit Arestonles adijcit dextram manum n^{on} vtilem leuam muliebrem esse quo hermafroditas appellamus.

ferunt certi ab orientis pte^{te} intima esse homines sine naribus: facie plana equi totius corporis planicie. Alios sup^{er}iore labro orbas. alios sine linguis et alijs c^{on}creta ora esse modico foramine calamus auenaz potu^m hauntes.

Item homines habentes labiu^m inferius. ita magnu^m vt totam faciem contegant labio dormientes.

Item aliq^{ui} sine linguis nutu loqu^{nt}es siue motu vt monachi.

Phanorbi in scythia aures tam magnas hnt. vt contegant totum corpus.

Artabate in ethiopia p^{ri}mi ambulat vt pecora. et alii qui viuunt p^{er} annos. xl. que^m uellus sup^{er}greditur.

Barri hominiones sunt aduncis naribus cornua i frontibus hnt et caprar^u pedibus similes quale^m in solitudine sanctus Antonius abbas vidit.

In ethiopia occidentali sunt vnipedes vno pede lassissimo tam veloces vt bestias insequantur.

In scythia tripodetes sunt humana^m formas equos pedes habentes.

In affrica familias quasda^m effascinat^u Ifigonius et alioemphodorus tradit quaz^u laudatone intercat. p^{er} barta. arefat arbores: emozit^u infantes. esse eiusdem generis in tribalis et illirg^u adijcit Ifigon^u q^{ui} visu quoc^u effascinant iratis scipue oculis: quod eoru^m malu^m facilius sentire puberes notabili^m esse q^{uod} puillas binas in oculis singulis habeant.

Item boies. v. cubitoz^u nuq^{uam} insigni^m vsq^{ue} ad moites dec oia scribit^r Plⁱ. Aug. I^ust^us^u. Preterea legit^r i gessi Alexandri q^{ui} i india sunt aliq^{ui} boies sex man^u hntes.

Item boies nudi et pilosi in flumine morantes.

Item boies manib⁹ et pedib⁹ sex digitos habentes.

Item apotham^u i aqs morantes med^u boies et med^u caballi.

Item mulieres cu^m barbis vsq^{ue} ad pect^{us} s^{ed} capite pl^us no sine crinibus.

In ethiopia occidentali sut^u ethiopes. uij. oculos hntes

In eripia sunt boies formosi et collo gramo cu^m rotis alatum boim^u effigies m^ustiferas circa exte^{ri}mitates gigni mime murti. Artifici ad formanda cor^{por}pora effigiesq^{ue} celandas mobilitate ignea.

Antipodes. at est. i. boies a p^{ar}te terre vbi sol orit^{ur} q^{uod} occidit nob^{is} aduersa pedib⁹ n^{ost}ris calcare vestigia nulla r^{ati}oe credendu^m est vt ait Aug. 16. de ci. dei. c. 9.

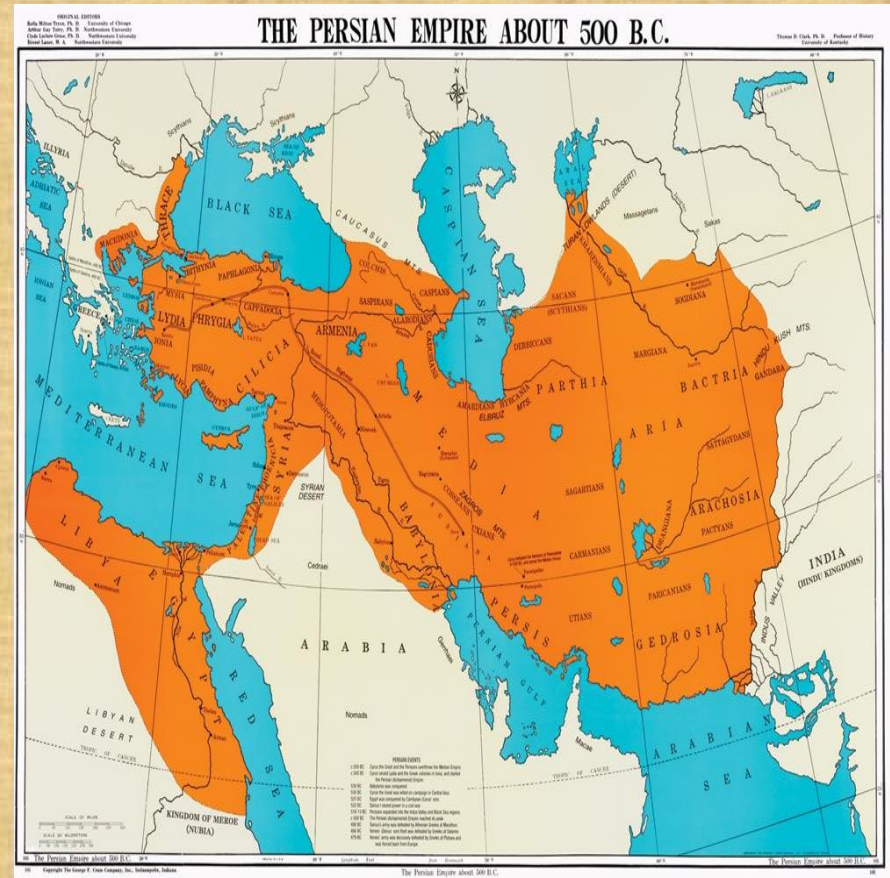
Inges in b^{er} pug^u l^uaz^u p^{er}trac^u vulgi opioes circufundi terre boies vndiq^{ue} couersileq^{ue} iter se pedib⁹ stare et cuncti silem est celi v^{er}it^{as}. At sili mo^{do} ex q^{uoc} pte^{te} media^m calcant. Et ur^{bi} at n^{on} decidit: mure^m et illi nos n^{on} decidere: na^m em repugnate: et quo cadat negate vt possint cadere. Na^m sic ignis sedes noⁿ est nisi i ignib⁹: aq^uu^m nisi i aqs. sp^{irit}us nisi in sp^{irit}u. Ita terre arcenibus c^{on}stitis nisi in se locus non est.



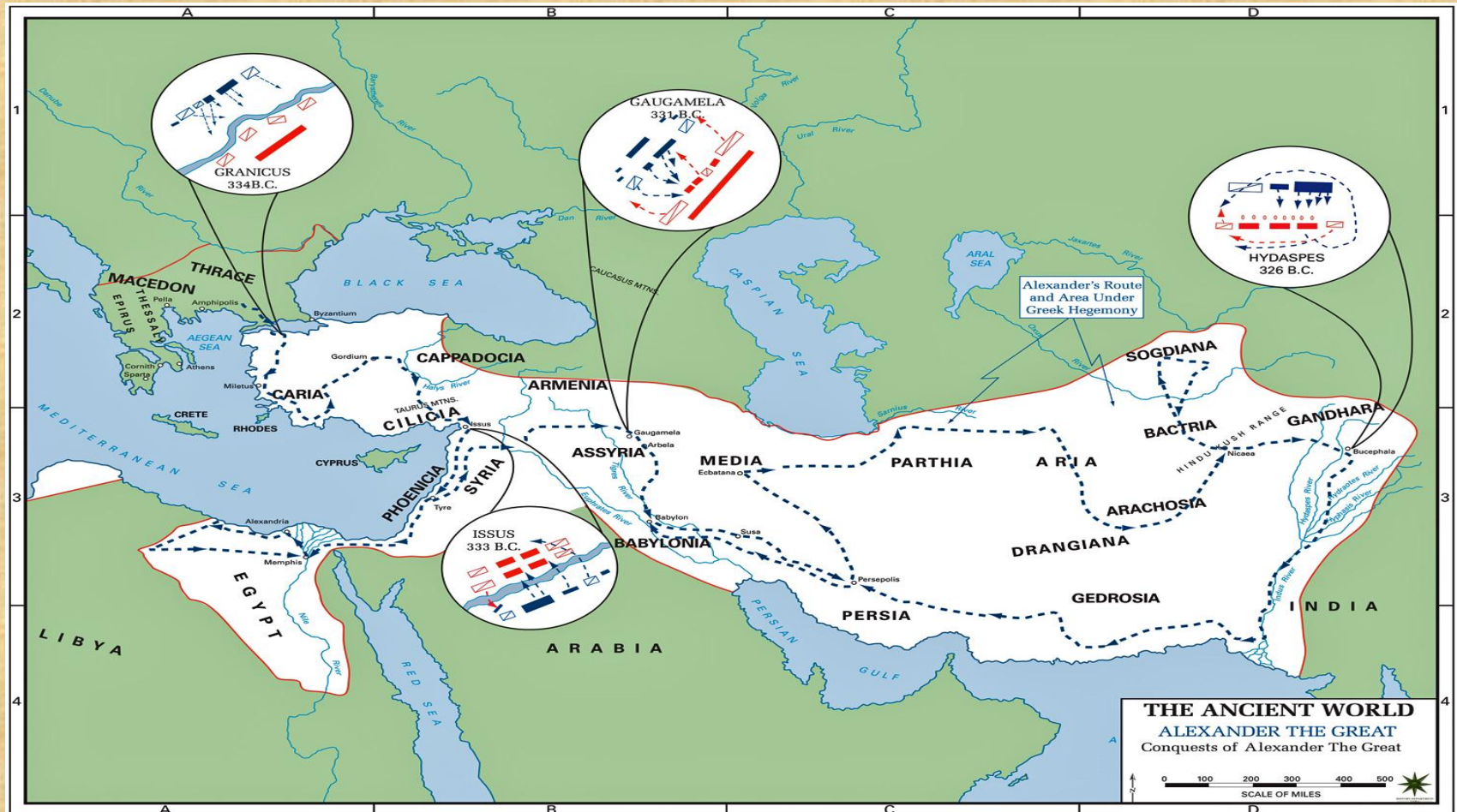
Monstrous races from *Liber chronicarum* – Nuremberg Chronicle

Herodotus on India

“The Indians live further east in Asia than anyone else – further east than any other known people of whom there is reliable information – because beyond them the eastern part of India is sandy and therefore uninhabitable.”
– Herodotus 3.98.



Alexander the Great and India



Maurya Empire

‘Likewise here in the imperial territories among the Greeks and the Kambojas [Indo-Iranians].....everywhere the people follow the Beloved of the Gods’ instructions in *Dhamma*.’ - **Thirteenth Major Rock Edict.**

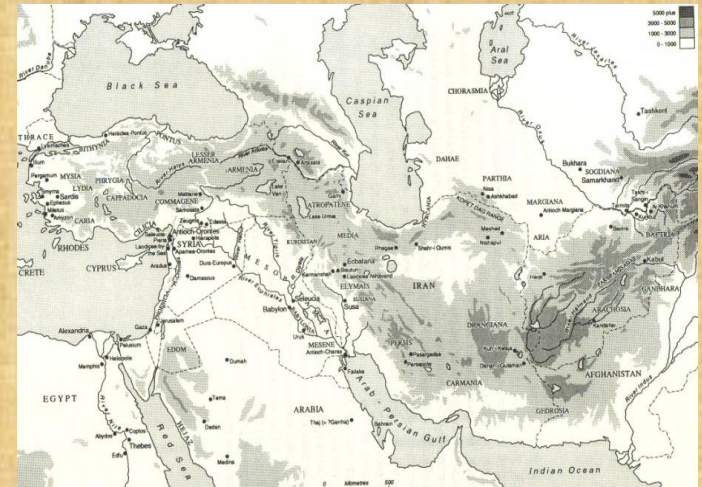
- ▣ Descendants of Ionian Colonists (Old Persian *Yauna* – Prakrit *Yona* – *Yavana*).
- ▣ Also those settled by Alexander.



Chandragupta's successors, Bindusara (298-273 BC) and Aśoka (273-232 BC).

Seleucids

- Military interest in elephants – seen as vital for warfare.
- Inscription recording gifts from Seleucus I to the sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma ‘...10 talents of frankincense; 1 talent of myrrh; 2 minae of casia; 2 minae of cinnamon, 2 minae of *costus*.’ (Talent = 25.86kg, minae = 431g).

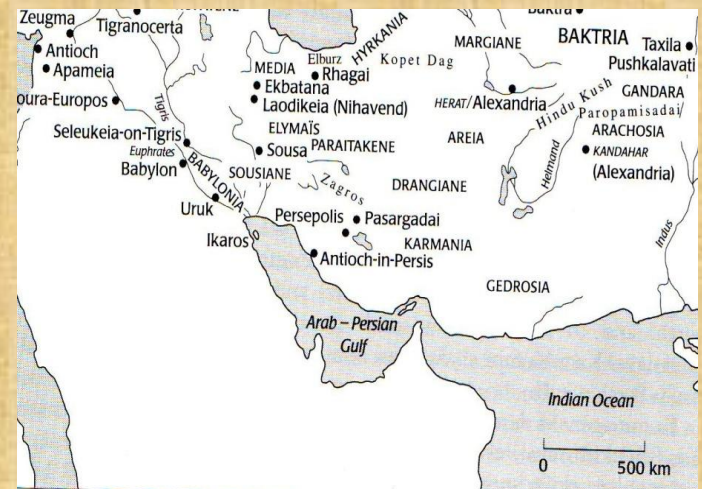


Bronze Statuette of Poseidon at Kolhapur

Based on an original by Lysippos (c. fourth century BC). Stylistically dates to c. 250 BC.



By land or sea?



Greco-Bactrians

- ❑ Bactria a Seleucid satrapy from late fourth-mid third century BC.
- ❑ 'At the same period, also, Theodotus [Diodotus], governor of the thousand cities of Bactria revolted, and assumed the title of King. – Justin 41.4.
- ❑ Antiochus III invades Bactria, fails to capture Bactra – Polybius 10.49, 11.34.



Diodotus I – name of Antiochus II.



Diodotus II – Adopts title *Basileus* for himself and for his father Posthumously.

Indo-Greek Kings

- End of the Mauryan Empire - assassination of its last ruler Brihadathra in 184 BC.
- Crossing the Hindu Kush and conquest into Northern India (by early-second century BC).
- Old Maurya capital at Pataliputra had been captured.



Linguistic Accommodation

- Bilingual coinage – native languages such as Brahmi and Kharoshthi. Example of Apollodotus I (c.180-160 BC).
- The brother kings Agathocles and Pantaleon (c. 190-180 BC) even issues some coins in purely native script.



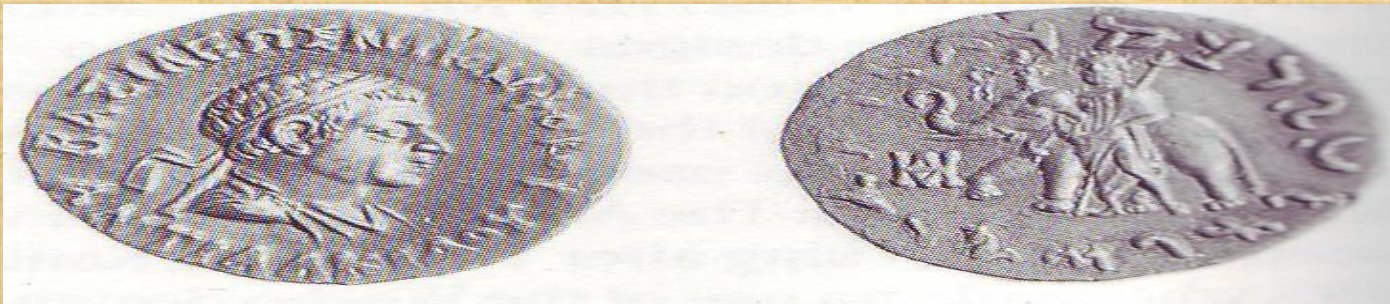
Religious Accommodation

- ▣ Agathocles silver bilingual coin with Indian deities.
- ▣ The Hindu deities recognised as Balarama-Samkarsana and his brother Vasudeva-Krishna.



Religious Conversion

- Heliodorus ambassador of Antialcidas (c. late 100's BC) in the Sunga Empire.
- Erected a pillar in Vidisha (modern Besangar):
“This Garuda-Standard of Vishnu, the god of the gods was erected here by the devotee Heliodorus...sent by the Great Greek King Antialcidas...”



Coin of Antialcidas - Zeus with an elephant (a traditional Indian symbol).

The Great Menander

- The most successful of the Indo-Greek kings (c. 160s-130 BC).
- Able to control territory spanning from the western Ganges valley, Gandhara, the Indus, and the Kabul valley.

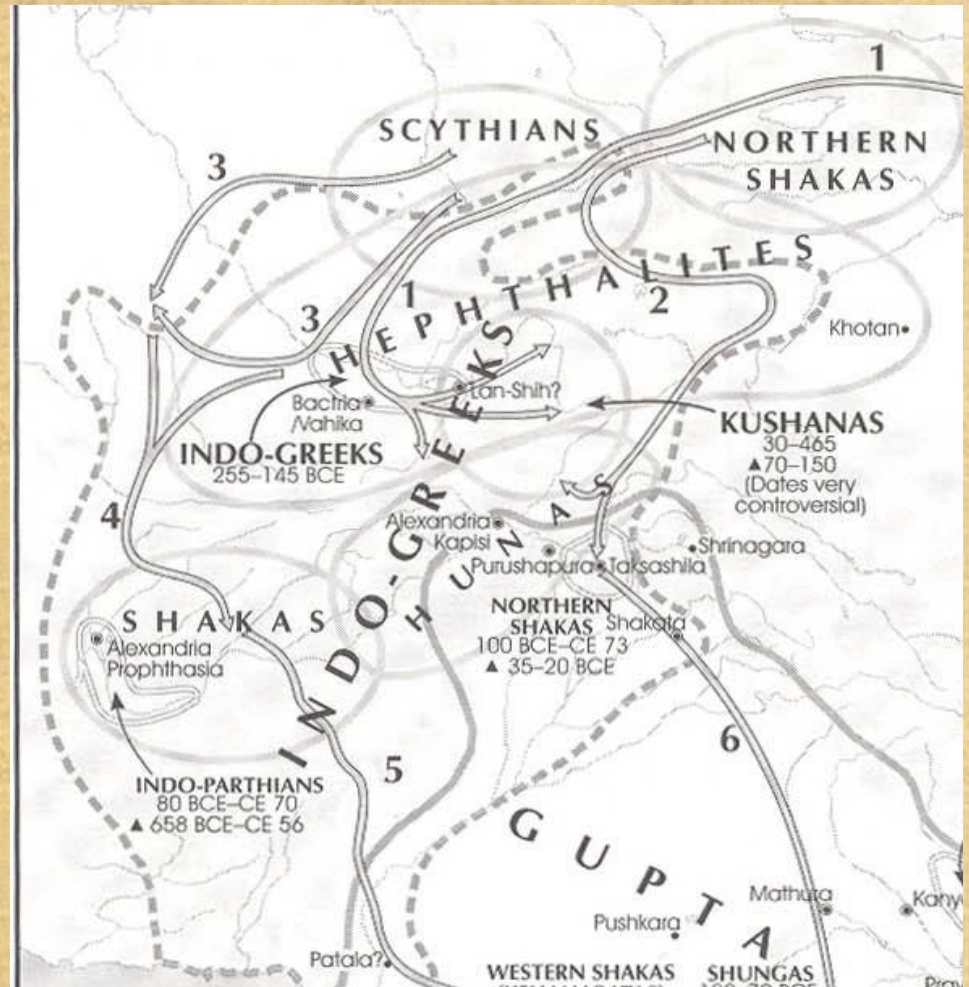


Menander / Milinda

- ❑ Converted to Buddhism according to a Pali text called the *Milindapanha* (The Questions of Milinda).
- ❑ Describes the discourse between the king and a Buddhist sage Nagasena.
- ❑ At the end of the discourse Menander is said to have adopted Buddhism and gave up his throne in order to achieve Nirvana.
- ❑ Alternative tradition – Plutarch (*Precepts of Statecraft* 28, 6) claims he died on the battlefield.

The End of the Indo-Greeks

- After death of Menander Indo-Greek kings continued to fight amongst themselves.
- Encroachment of central Asian peoples into Bactrian and Indo-Greek territory – such as Sakas, Skytho-Parthians and the Kushans.
- Last Graeco-Bactrian king Hermaeus rules with his queen Calliope in the Kabul valley, until around 30 BC.



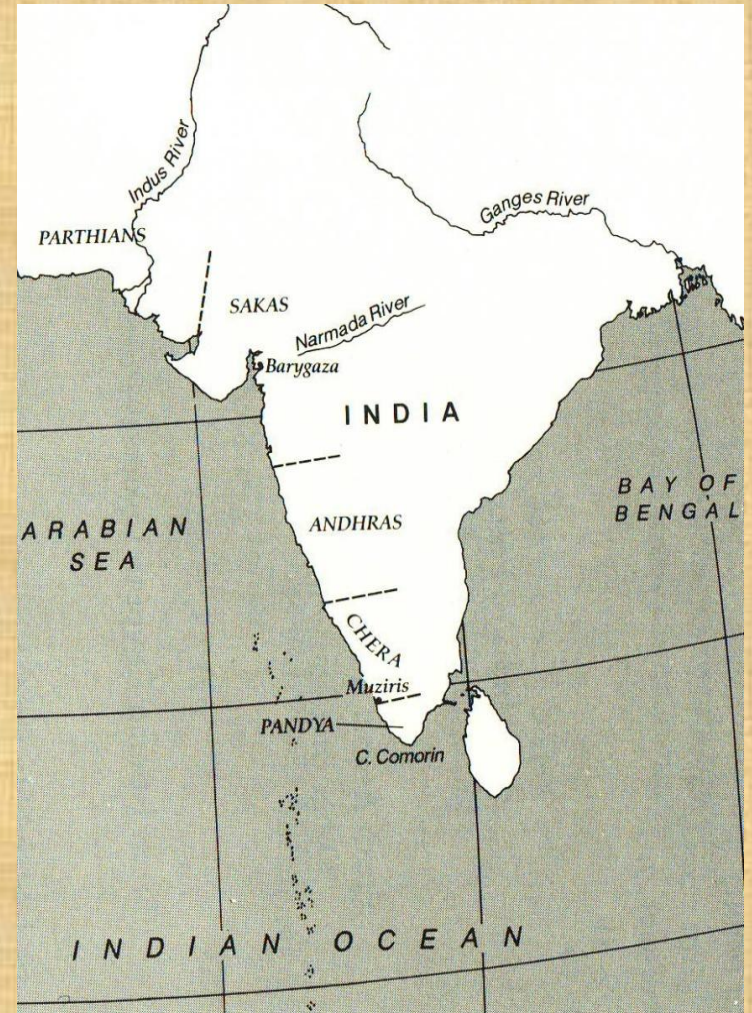
Survival of Greek Coins and Influence

‘...there are to be found in the market in Barygaza even today old drachmas engraved with the inscriptions, in Greek letters, of Apollodotus and Menander, rulers who came after Alexander.’ – *PME*.

Coins of the Kushan King Kanishka



- Greek Script and Language was even be used as late as the first and somewhat into the second century AD.
- Greek deities on his coins such as Helios (the sun) and Selene the moon).



Greek Influence on Art



Peshawar Valley - first-second centuries AD – Image from Boardman et al (1992).

- ❑ Gandhara style from the first century AD onwards
- ❑ Borrows from Earlier Greek influences.
- ❑ Possibly Greek influence via trade in the Roman period.
- ❑ Greek human and religious figures – representations of Buddha.

Ptolemaic Empire

- By late second century BC the Ptolemaic rulers start exploiting Red Sea route to India.
- Denied overland route due to Seleucid hostility.
- Early trading activity confined to east coast of Africa – gold and elephants.

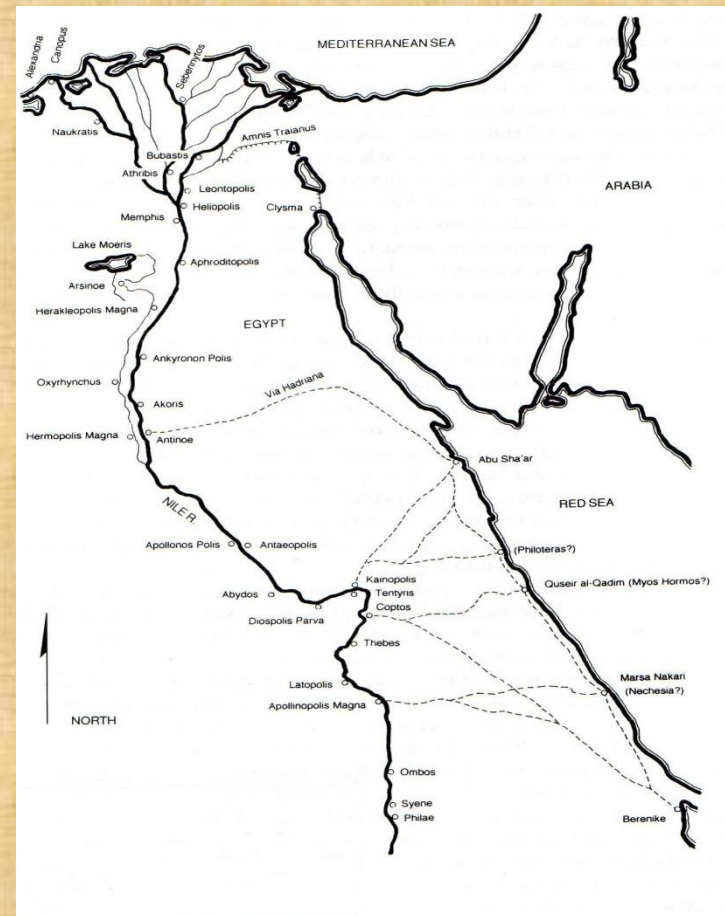


Image from Young (2001).

Arabs Acting as Intermediaries

“Eudaimon Arabia [prosperous Arabia], a full-fledged city in earlier days, was called Eudaimon when, since vessels from India did not go on to Egypt and those from Egypt did not dare sail to the places further on but came only this far, it used to receive cargoes from both...” – *PME* 26.

Ignorance of the Monsoon Winds?

- ▣ Eudoxus of Cyzicus.

- 'Now it so happened, the story continues, that a certain Indian was brought to the king by the coast-guards of the recess of the Arabian Gulf, who said that they had found him half-dead and alone on a stranded ship... and when the Indian had learned Greek, he related that on his voyage from India he by a mischance mistook his course and reached Egypt in safety...he promised to act as guide on the trip to India for the men who had been previously selected by the King; and of this party Eudoxus, also, became a member...So Eudoxus sailed away with presents; and he returned with a cargo of perfumes and precious stones...But Eudoxus was wholly deceived in his expectations, for Euergetes [II] took from him his entire cargo.' – **Strabo 2.3.4-5.**

- ▣ Hippalus – *PME* 57.

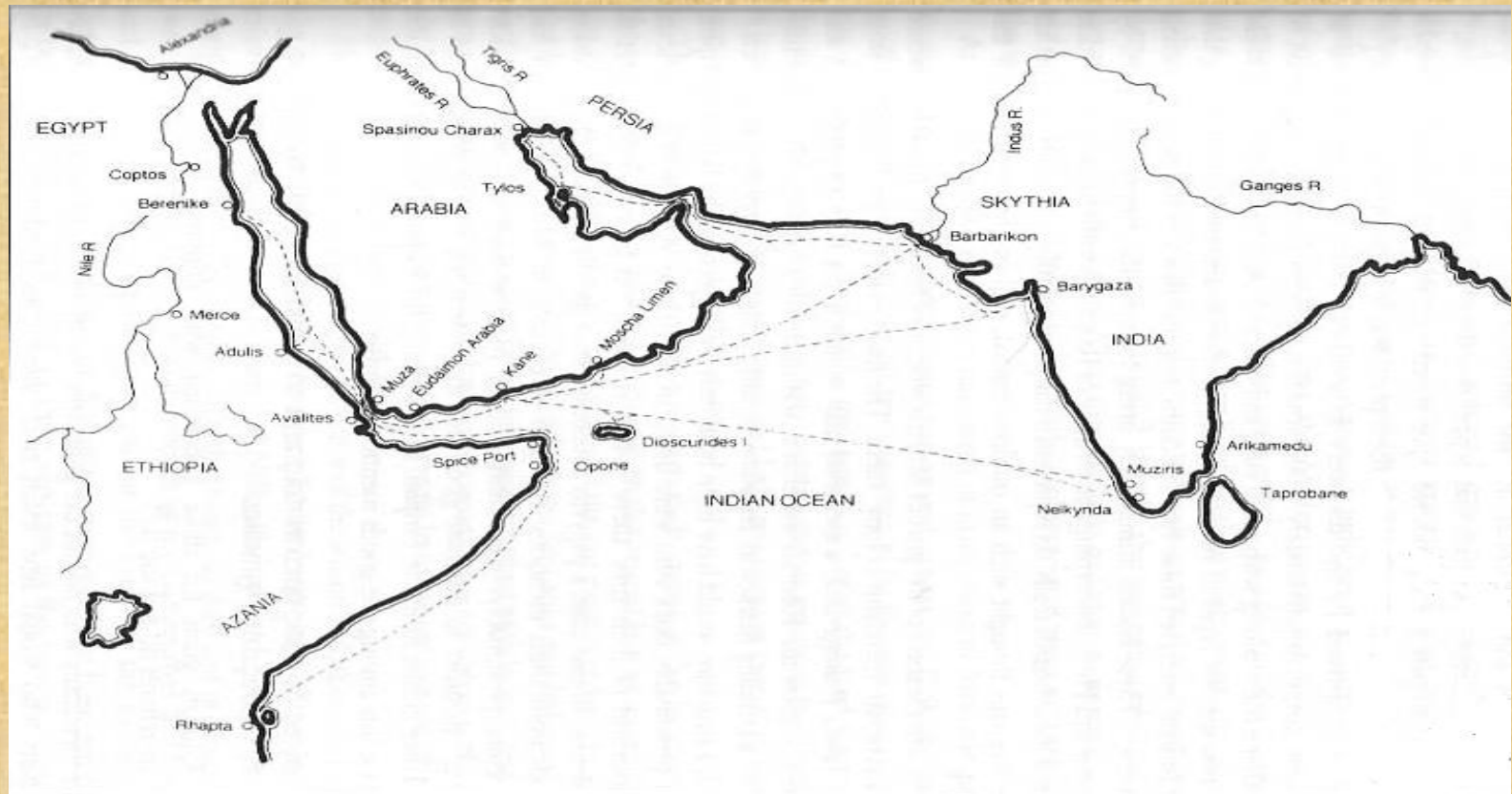


Image from Young 2001

- The office of 'superintendent of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean' appears in an an at Coptos c. late first century BC - SB 8036.

Roman Conquest of Egypt

- ▣ Augustus takes control of Egypt in 31/30 BC.
- ▣ Massive Growth in Trade with India.

‘...the merchants of Alexandria are already sailing with fleets by way of the Nile and of the Arabian Gulf as far as India, these regions also have become far better known to us of to-day than to our predecessors...I learned that as many as one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from Myos Hormos to India, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise.’ – **Strabo 2.5.12.**

The Goods Traded – Imports

- ▣ A variety of different products imported from bulkier goods to low weight high value items.
- ▣ Spices and aromatics – pepper (esp. black), cassia, frankincense, nard.
- ▣ Textiles – silks, Seric skins, cotton cloth.
- ▣ Precious gems – beryl, opal.
- ▣ Woods – teak, ebony.



The Goods Traded – Exports

- ▣ Mixed types of goods.
- ▣ Heavy/bulky items – non-precious metals, e.g. copper.
- ▣ Crafted goods – bronze-ware, glass, reworked imports (silk!).
- ▣ Foodstuffs and drink – wine, olive oil, maybe garum?
- ▣ Precious red coral.
- ▣ Gold and silver coins.



Roman and imitation coins found in India

- Around 6,000 *denarii* (silver coins) and 1,500 *aurei* (gold coins) found in India, including some imitations.
- Possibly an extra 8,000 *aurei* in Kottayam hoard.
- Most of the coins Julio-Claudian (30 BC-AD 68), and mostly found in southern and central India.
- Most aurei probably exported from reigns of Nero to Antoninus Pius.
- One *aureus* equal to 25 *denarii* (in Roman Empire)
- *Aureus* = 8 g. / 7.3 g
- *Denarius* = 3.9 g. / 3.4 g



Drainage of Gold and Silver?

“And it will not be amiss to set out the whole of the voyage from Egypt, now that reliable knowledge of it is for the first time accessible. It is an important subject, in view of the fact that in no year does India absorb less than fifty million sesterces of our empire’s wealth, sending back merchandise to be sold with us at a hundred times its prime cost.” – **Pliny NH 6.26.101.**

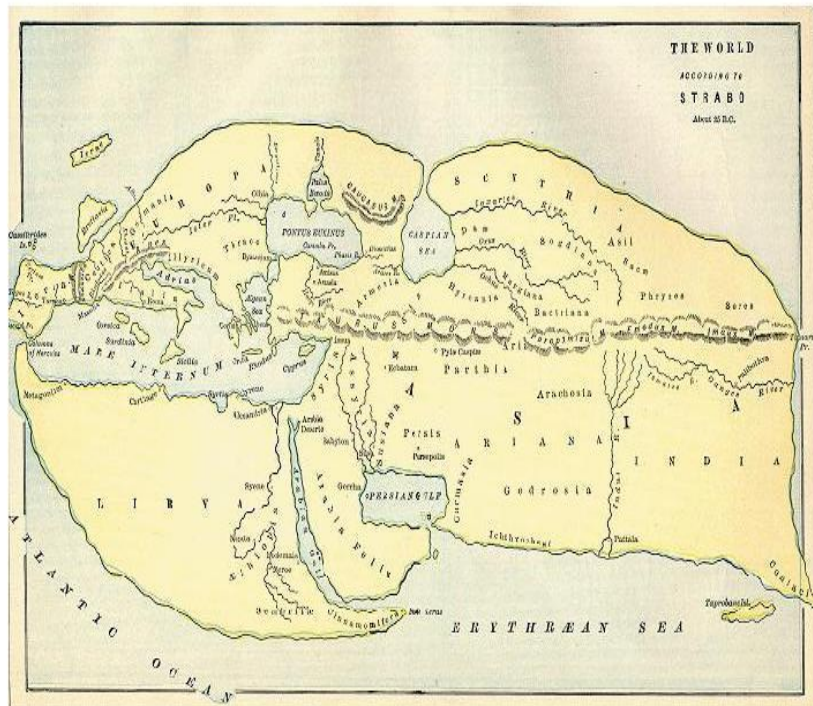
“But the title ‘happy’ belongs still more to the Arabian Sea, for from it come the pearls which that country sends us. And at the lowest reckoning, India, China, and the Arabian peninsula take from our empire 100 million sesterces every year - this is the sum which our luxuries and our women cost us.” – **(12.41.84).**

Balance of trade debate

- ▣ There is contention over what Pliny's figures represent and if they have a valid statistical basis.
- ▣ Even if figures represent gold and silver (100 million *sesterces* = 25 million *denarii* = 1 million *aurei* – no more than 108 tons in weight) only 2.5% of cargo space taken up if spread across 60 small (75 ton capacity) vessels.
- ▣ Most of cargo space taken up by barter goods?

Increasing Knowledge?

Strabo About 25 BCE



Based on Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography* c.150 AD

“Romans” Living in India



The Peutinger Table

- Evidence for Indians and Arabians residing in Egypt – merchant colonies.
- Claudius Ptolemy *Geography* 7.2. – merchant colony at Muziris.
- Material culture Arikamedu?
- Yavanas in Tamil literature?

Bibliography

- ▣ Warmington, E. H. (1928) *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India*. London: Cambridge University Press. – 1974 reprint in the library.